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10 September 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Assistance to Dr. Kissinger in Replying to Senator Symington's Questions

1. On Saturday afternoon, 8 September, I was called at my home by Mr. William Stearman of the NSC Staff. Mr. Stearman explained that during Dr. Kissinger's confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 9 September, Senator Symington had alleged that the U.S. Government's "secret war" in Laos had been "discovered" by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff and that the "secret" bombing of Cambodia had been discovered by the staff of the Armed Services Committee. These allegations were the backdrop to a "when will you stop beating your wife" line of questioning concerning Dr. Kissinger's willingness not to deceive the U.S. Congress in the future on important foreign policy matters. Mr. Stearman said that in responding, Dr. Kissinger had taken the tack that Senator Symington's factual statements were in error. Symington had thereupon charged Kissinger with submitting, in writing, a statement for the record clarifying any such factual issues. On the Laos matter, the NSC Staff had drafted the following statement on which Stearman wanted my comments or approval:

"I have been told by CIA and other agencies of the government that between 1962 and 1969 extensive briefings on covert U.S. operations in Laos were given to appropriate committees and members of the Congress."

2. I told Stearman that although his text was substantially accurate, I was not positive about the 1962 date. During the course of the ensuing

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discussion I emphasized the necessity of not making any formal written statement challengeable on grounds of accuracy even in small details and at the same time explained why the records involved would be hard to dig out and check over the weekend, though they could easily be reviewed first thing Monday morning (10 September). In the interim, I suggested that the statement at least be modified to fuzz the 1962 date by some language such as "for several years prior to 1969." Stearman said this would be fine but asked me to call back as soon as possible on 10 September.

3. At OOB on 10 September, I contacted Chief, EA and the office of the Legislative Counsel. Mr. Maury brought to the Executive Committee meeting a brief summary of the record which indicated that the first briefing of Congress on covert U.S. support to Laos military activities had in fact been given by Mr. Dulles (then DCI) on 2 May 1961. After some discussion, I was commissioned by the Director to check the record further and compose a suggested reply for Dr. Kissinger in light thereof.

4. After further talks with the Legislative Counsel, I drafted the language appearing below which was communicated by telephone to Mr. Stearman that morning:

"On 2 May 1961, the late Allen Dulles --- then Director of Central Intelligence -- informed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of covert U.S. support to certain Laotian military forces. Since Mr. Dulles' 1961 appearance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, numerous briefings on covert U.S. operations in Laos have been given to appropriate committees and individual members of Congress. These have included extensive and detailed briefings offered to explain and justify appropriations requests to the congressional committees and subcommittees -- or individual members thereof -- charged by the Congress with oversight responsibility for the U.S. Government components conducting these operations in Laos. "

5. In relaying the above language, which Mr. Stearman said was very helpful, I explained that, actually, during the period from 1961 through June 1973, the covert U.S. role in Laos had been discussed by CIA

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representatives at a total of 35 briefings of Senate committees or sub-committees and that a total of 57 individual Senators had been informed about CIA operations in Laos either individually or through these committee briefings. The Senator briefed most often and in the greatest detail was, ironically, Senator Symington. He had had the entire Laos operation shown to him during his visit to Vientiane in September 1967. Furthermore, at his instigation, our then Chief of Station (Mr. Shackley) had been called back to Washington and gave a detailed, classified briefing on all aspects of the Agency's Laos operations to the full Senate Armed Services Committee in an executive session of the latter held in October 1967. After these briefings, Senator Symington had (in the Committee forum) praised the Agency's conduct of its operations in Laos, terming them a model of the way in which the U.S. Government ought to conduct such matters. I emphasized to Stearman, however, that nothing would be gained by embarrassing Senator Symington in a public forum. Hence, it was necessary that we stick to the general and elliptical language proposed above. Stearman said he understood the situation completely and agreed with our position.



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Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

cc: Legislative Counsel ✓  
Chief, EA

- 3 -

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